

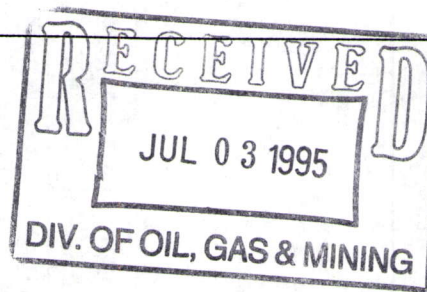


United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Spanish Fork
Ranger District

44 West 400 North
Spanish Fork, UT 84660



File Code: 2810/1950

Date: May 23, 1995

Mr. Wilford Coombs
1181 East 580 South
Provo, UT 84606

Dear Mr. Coombs:

I am enclosing a copy of the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Joes Canyon Mining Proposal/Plan of Operation on the Spanish Fork Ranger District for your review and comments. Four alternatives were considered and analyzed in the EA, and I have identified Alternative D as the preferred alternative.

Alternative D includes drilling only on claim #353272, re-opening the caved-in adit on claim #351552 without timing restrictions; and reopening and expanding the open adit on claim #351552 within the time restrictions set forth in the biological evaluation, to protect Townsend Big-eared Bat habitat. The submitted Plan of Operations will be supplemented with attached stipulations to meet the reclamation and mitigation needs identified in the environmental analysis, as documented in the Environmental Assessment. Forest Plan standards and guidelines will be included in the stipulations. A performance bond for \$3,000 will be required. A gate will be placed in an appropriate location where road #563 currently ends. Road #563 will be reconstructed as needed to establish access to the claims. Reclamation work will include the adequate closure of the adits and the section of road to be reopened.

Although a preferred alternative has been identified, my final decision on which alternative to implement has not been made. You can help me in making this decision by providing written comments on the EA. Your comments regarding the EA should be mailed to me at the following address: Earl L. Kerns, Spanish Fork Ranger District, 44 West 400 North, Spanish Fork, UT 84660.

Comments must be postmarked or received within 31 days after publication of this notice in the *Provo Daily Herald*. Your comments need to be as specific as possible and contain the following:

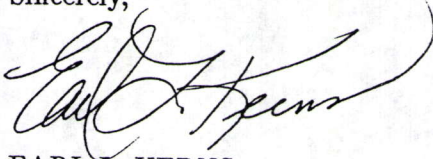
1. Name, address, and (if possible) phone number.
2. Title of the document on which comment is being submitted.
3. Specific facts or comments along with supporting reasons that I should consider in reaching a decision.



Caring for the Land and Serving People

If you have any questions regarding this proposal, please contact Mark Sensibaugh at (801) 623-2735.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Earl L. Kerns", with a large, sweeping flourish extending from the end of the name.

EARL L. KERNS
Acting, District Ranger

Enclosure

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
MINING EXPLORATION PROJECT
JOES CANYON

PROPOSED ACTION

The Spanish Fork District, Uinta National Forest, proposes to approve a Plan of Operation for mineral exploration in Joes Canyon, as submitted by the claimant Mr. Coombs. Details of this proposal include:

1. Reconstruction of approximately 1/2 mile of the existing road, so that approximately 1 1/2 miles of road can be utilized to access old mining sites on claims; #351552 located in the NW 1/4 of Sec. 24 T.10S., R.6W., and #353273 located in the SE 1/4 of Sec. 24.
2. Conduct a trenching activity to explore an exposed vein on claim #353273. The trench would be about two ft. wide and approximately 400 ft. in length. The trench would be dug with a tractor backhoe.
3. Explore the old mine shaft on claim #351552. This would entail digging a new adit directly below the old one to try and locate the old vein. Waste rock would be placed at the old dump site. This work would be done using a compressor driven rock drill, dynamite, an ore cart and a backhoe.
4. Re-open an old mine shaft on claim #351552. This would entail digging out the caved-in workings and shoring up the old opening. Some new digging at the back of the old adit is possible. Waste rock would be placed at the old dump site. This work would be done using a compressor driven rock drill, dynamite, an ore cart and a backhoe.

The proposed project would occur in the spring of 1995, with an updated plan submitted following exploration work. Mitigation would include; placing a gate on the newly opened road, establishment of a reclamation bond and the development of a reclamation plan. In addition the proponents have agreed to clean up old debris remaining from previous operations that they are not associated with.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of this operation is to obtain additional information on the mineral potential of these claims that cannot be obtained from surface observations.

DECISIONS TO BE MADE IN THE ANALYSIS

Based on the analysis documented in this Environmental Assessment, the Forest Service will decide whether or not to approve this proposal, and if so, under what conditions and when.

ISSUES

As a result of public involvement and discussions with Forest Service personnel, the following issues were identified:

1. The proposed project area is partially located within an inventoried roadless area. There is an existing, abandoned road to the old mine site but it is currently closed due to erosion conditions.
2. The old mine sites were improperly administered and as a result there is an old cabin and other mining debris scattered around with no responsible individual or an established reclamation procedure for cleaning up the site. There is a concern with cleaning up the existing site and preventing additional debris accumulation from any new operations.
3. There is a concern over the amount of surface disturbance proposed by the proponents. There are other methods to determine the dimensions of the vein like drilling that will not cause significant surface disturbance.
4. There is an issue with the proposed project and potential conflicts with sensitive and/or endangered wildlife. The Vernon area is a popular area for bald eagles and the old open adit is being used by the Townsend big eared bat.
5. There is an issue of developing an economical and effective method of determining the mineral potential of these claims. The claimant must obtain sufficient data to determine the future development of these claims but it must be done in a reasonably economical manner and not to preclude exploration.

ALTERNATIVES

Based on these issues, the following range of alternatives were developed:

Alternative A - No Action

The project would not take place. No planned exploration would occur at this site, the Forest Service would not approve a plan of operations for this area. This alternative would be in direct conflict with the existing rights of the claimant under the 1872 mining law.

Alternative B - Proposed Action

This alternative would implement the proposed plan of operations as submitted by the proponent with Forest Service stipulations. The old road would be opened by having the proponent complete reconstruction needs on about 1/2 mile of road. The proponent would excavate the exposed vein on claim #353273 by trenching a 2 ft. by 400 ft. area deep enough to calculate the extent of the vein.

The proponent would also explore the old adits on claim #351552 by; 1. re-opening the old tunnel and by digging directly below the existing opening, 2. re-opening the caved in tunnel by digging out the caved in debris. Excavated debris would be placed at the old dump site. The proponent would travel back and forth to the site on the old road as well as camp, for short periods, on the claims. Mitigation for this alternative would include:

1. The proponent and the Forest Service would develop a reclamation plan which would include a reclamation performance bond in the amount of \$3,000. The plan would also provide for reclamation of all surface disturbing activities, closure of the old road and closure of the old and new adits following exploration work.
2. The newly opened road would be gated at the present location where the road ends. The proponent would maintain this closure until such time as the road is closed and reclaimed following operations.
3. Any new operations not covered by the approved operating plan will have to be approved in writing by the approving officer prior to implementation.
4. Work on the existing adit (open) would be modified to minimize impacts to the Townsend Big-eared Bat. This would preclude operations from occurring between June 1st and August 30th. All mitigation measures identified in the biological evaluation report prepared for this project will also be implemented into the Plan of Operation.
5. Additional stipulations would be attached and made a part of the Plan of Operations.

Alternative C

This alternative would change the proponents methods of exploration on both claims. The proponent would be authorized to re-open the road to the claims by doing the 1/2 mile of reconstruction. The proponent would only be authorized to drill the claims using a track mounted core drill. In this phase of the operation no trenching or tunneling would be approved. Access and occupancy of the claims would be the same as described in alternative B. Mitigation for this alternative would include:

1. A reclamation plan would be developed and would include a reclamation performance bond in the amount of \$1,500. The plan would address road closure and reclamation of any surface disturbance associated with the drilling operation.
2. The road would be gated until such time as it was reclaimed and closed (permanently) following the exploration activities.
3. Any activities outside the scope of the approved plan of operations would have to be approved in writing by the line officer prior to implementation.

Alternative D

This alternative would change the exploration method on claim #353272 to only allow drilling with a track core drill rather than trenching. The proponents proposal to reopen and expand the existing adit and the caved in adit on claim #351552 would be authorized. The proposed road reconstruction and reopening would be approved. Mitigation for this alternative would include:

1. A reclamation plan would be developed that would include a reclamation bond in the amount of \$3,000. This plan would address reclamation of the road, the adit and new diggings as well as any surface disturbance associated with the exploration activities.
2. The road would be gated following completion of the reconstruction work, until the road was permanently closed following the exploration activities.
3. Any activities not covered in the approved plan of operations would have to be approved in writing prior to implementation.
4. Work on the existing adit (open) would be modified to minimize impacts to the Townsend Big-eared Bat. This would preclude operations from occurring between June 1st and August 30th. All mitigation measures identified in the biological evaluation report prepared for this project will also be implemented into the Plan of Operation.
5. Additional stipulations would be attached and made a part of the Plan of Operations.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

1. Impacts to the Natural Resources.

This would include any impacts to soil, water, air, visual resources, and wildlife. The existing claims are located at the head of Joes Canyon. Claim #353273 is on a small ridge near the bottom of the canyon. Claim #351552 is in a small draw, but includes the side hill of Black Peak and a small ridge. The soils are sandy and rocky and well drained. The average top soil depth is about 2-3 inches. Vegetation is mostly sage brush/grass type with scattered pockets of oak brush and aspen. The area is habitat for deer, small mammals, rodents and birds that are associated with this habitat type. The primary value of the area for wildlife is its remote character. This area is also used by bald eagles on a seasonal basis (winter). The average elevation is 7,400 feet on claim #353273 and 7,700 feet on claim #351552. There are no springs, live streams or wetlands associated with the operation. The alternatives would have the following potential environmental effects associated with the current conditions are:

Alternative A

The current conditions would not change. There would be no surface disturbance on any of the claims.

Alternative B

This alternative would remove the vegetation from the areas to be trenched (an estimated 1/4 acre). Following exploration these disturbed sites would be recontoured and covered with top soil and reseeded with a seed mixture. It would take one growing season to reestablish vegetation but it would take from 5-10 years to duplicate the existing vegetation. Site disturbance would be expected to last 4-6 weeks. During this time period there would be some short-term increase in sedimentation, but Forest Standards and Guidelines for water quality will not be exceeded. Wildlife associated with claim #353273 will not be significantly affected. This activity will have an effect on the solitude and remote characteristics of the area during the time period that machinery is being operated.

The reopening of the adits on claim #351552 will cause significant surface disturbance, but not significant surface impacts as the area is already disturbed from previous mining activities. The existing tunnel site will be expanded and enlarged but it is a rocky area with very little vegetation. The excavated material will be deposited on top of the old dump site. This operation will include some blasting and operation of machinery so the solitude of the area will be impacted. Implementation of the mitigation measures identified in the biological evaluation will minimize impacts to the Townsend Big-eared Bat. Some displacement will occur as a result of the planned activity.

The caved-in adit will also be expanded and enlarged. The excavated material will be deposited on top of the old dump site. The impacts to solitude described above will be similar for this operation. The re-opening of this adit will have no critical impacts to wildlife.

Following exploration activities the tunnels will be closed so as to block human entrance. The shafts will also be reclaimed to the point that water quality will not be affected following termination of operations. The dump site will be stabilized but the rocky material will not be covered with top soil as the new material will be placed on top of existing dump material. These operations and the presence of the workers will cause impacts to the normal solitude of the site for a period of 6-8 months.

The work on the old road will generate increased run off during periods of precipitation. The amount of increased sediment will be dependent on the type of storm (intensity and duration). The small amount of disturbed area (3/10th of an acre) and the flat slopes would not generate significant run off beyond (Forest Plan Standards). Visual quality of the area will not be changed but the trenched area will be visible for a 2-3 year period.

Alternative C

The impacts associated with the road described above in Alternative A will be associated with this alternative. The other work on the claims will generate short term impacts to the solitude during periods of drill operation. Surface disturbance will be limited to the drill pads. These sites will not require excavation but drill tailings and plant trampling will be associated with each site. The drill and support equipment will need to be moved cross country and set up at several locations. The duration of these activities will vary with the exploration needs but will be in the neighborhood of 2-4 weeks. There will be no other impacts associated with this alternative.

Alternative D

This alternative would result in the same impacts associated with the road as described in Alternative B above. There would be minimum impacts on claim #353273 as the only surface disturbance would be the placement of a drill and the associated equipment. The drilling would generate drill tailings and plant trampling at the different drilling sites. The number of drill sites is not known but it is estimated that 2-5 sites would be drilled. The drill equipment would have to be transported overland to the different drill sites. Drilling on this claim would take 1-3 weeks.

On claim #351552 the disturbance and impacts described in Alternative B would take place. The most significant impacts would be the disruption to solitude from the blasting and the operation of the equipment. The current conditions associated with this site are such that the proposed activities will not generate significant surface disturbances. Most of the surface disturbance will occur on areas where previous disturbances have already occurred. The impacts associated with exploring this claim are expected to last an estimated 6-8 months.

2. Ability to successfully and economically explore the mineral potential of these claims.

The ability to offset removal and reclamation costs can affect the potential to successfully treat this area.

Alternative A

This alternative will not cost the proponent any money but it will not allow him to obtain any information.

Alternative B

This alternative would allow for the most economical operation from the proponents view point. The proponent has a track backhoe and the other equipment to complete the exploration work described under this alternative. This alternative would allow the proponent to do the work without renting or purchasing additional equipment.

This alternative will provide the most flexibility to the proponent while allowing him to work at his own pace and modify his operation to meet the exploration needs based on the information obtained from daily activities.

Alternative C

This alternative would cost the proponent the most money as he would have to rent or otherwise acquire a core drill to drill these claims. This alternative would also be the least flexible as it would limit the data that could be collected and it would not allow the proponent to modify his exploration activities as his data collection progressed. The proponent would be able to adjust the amount and location of the drilling but he would be affected by the economics of the scheduling.

Alternative D

This alternative would cost more than Alternative B due to the need to rent a core drill to complete exploration work on claim #353273. It would allow the proponent to use his equipment to complete the exploration work on claim #351552. The exact cost difference would depend on the rate associated with the core drill offset by the costs to run the track back hoe, including the reclamation costs. There would be a loss in exploration flexibility on the drilled claim, as well as some additional inconvenience to the proponent.

3. Impacts to the Roadless Area

All the action alternatives will have an impact on the roadless character as a result of opening the old road. None of the alternatives will construct new roads. The current roadless character will not be significantly altered by any of the alternatives.

4. Impacts to Threatened, Endangered or Sensitive Species

None of the alternatives will have significant impacts to threatened or endangered plants or animals. A sensitive species the Townsend Big-eared Bat, will not be significantly impacted if the mitigation measures identified in the biological evaluation are followed.

CONSULTATION WITH OTHERS

The following people were consulted in the process of preparing this document:

Forest Service - Tom Tidwell, Mark Sensibaugh, Carol Nunn-Hatfield, Charmaine Thompson.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife

State Historical Preservation Society

In addition, public involvement was conducted and no comments were received.